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HAPPENINGS OF THE ORANGE ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENT AS AN EXAMPLE OF SURREALISM IN POLAND IN THE 1980S

Abstract: *This text is a contribution to the state of research on the surrealist dimension of the actions and verbal messages of the movement known as the Orange Alternative. The author outlines the role of happenings and their artistic and contestation dimensions, as well as showing the links with surrealism. A special dimension of contestation was given to it by the founder of the Orange Alternative movement in Poland - Waldemar „Major" Fydrych, highlighting the essence of the happening's verbal message. The text includes references to the inspiration of Max Ernst's Collages and André Breton's Manifesto of Surrealism as inspiration for the programmatic activities and verbal messages of the Orange Alternative that are part of the examples of happenings presented here from the beggining of the 1980s to the decline of the movement's activity. The actions of the group created by Waldemar „Major" Fydrych are part of the current of socialist surrealism, reflecting the essence of the changes taking place in Poland by the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. At the end of this text one can find a reflection on the artistic legacy of Major, who is recognised as one of the world's most important surrealists.*

Key words: *Waldemar „Major" Fydrych, happenings, surrealism, surrealist, Orange Alternative.*

1. Introduction

This text does not aspire to an exhaustive analysis of the surrealist dimension of happenings in Poland, but is a kind of complementary reflection to the research on

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the surrealist dimensions of the Orange Alternative's activities, which the author of the text has been documenting and conducting for thirty years. The commonly analysed dimensions of French surrealism and its influence on Polish surrealism were deliberately omitted, for the author has included them in her previous works (Moldovan-Cywińska, 2023). The framework of the formal requirements of the texts also does not allow to present all possible aspects of the problem.

Happening in the Polish artistic sphere has been around since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and became popular thanks to the systematic activities of the social-avant-garde movement known as the Orange Alternative. Some researchers say that a single example from the earlier period was a musical event on the initiative of the Polish composer Bogusław Schaeffer, at the initiative of which two pianists, Zygmunt Krauze and John Tilbury, performed a piece entitled *Non stop*, alternately for eight hours (Kański, 2014:p.283-285).

The essence of happenings is based on various forms of organised activities or a single action set in a specific time frame on the basis of a general scenario. The creator or creators include content of programmatic, contestation nature, giving a new meaning to the props used with space for improvisation and interaction with the audience. Happening is a form of artistic stature event, while its origins date back to theater, although the verbal message is, in a way, complementary to the main events. (Moldovan-Cywińska, 2023). It can also be defined as a form of collage due to the coexistence of elements of diverse provenance, mixing things to create a new symbolic quality.

Max Ernst, making collage, as it were, a form of opening to a new surrealist message, was inspired by the advertising catalogs of companies selling scientific aids in the field of anthropology, zoology, paleontology, and the experience of comparing seemingly unrelated images evoked in him, which were practically visions if not outright hallucinations (ibid.). This artist, fascinated by the phenomenon of mass commerce, created, among other things, the collage *The Hat Makes the Man* (1920), suggesting the uniformity of appearance of representatives of the new era. Ernst stood not only on the side of Dadaism and Surrealism, but also on the side of Communism, making art involved and subservient to political ideas.

Following Ernst's example, the creator of the Orange Alternative movement, Waldemar „Major" Fydrych, decided to combine surrealist objects and figures, but above all, programme slogans in the street, obtaining an unprecedented effect and attracting thousands of young people mainly from the circles of the largest universities in Poland: Wrocław University, Warsaw University, Wroclaw Academy

of Fine Arts and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin to create new configurations of meaning and symbolism (Stan, 2024).

Fydrych was born in Toruń, in central Poland. Abroad, he is a well-known initiator and leader of the Orange Alternative movement, which came to be known as the "carnival revolution", which was a response to the clash between pro-communist and anti-communist youth movements. As an avant-garde theoretician, prose writer, and poet, he had been searching for a military-oriented pseudonym for a long time, the use of which would give him an audience and respect among young people. As early as the 1980s, he used the title of Commander of the Fortress of Wroclaw, thus alluding in a way to the position of the military fortress of the city of Wroclaw until 1939.

The Orange Alternative, created by him, whose programme assumptions were included in the Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism, won the prestigious "Ashes and Diamonds" award (1988). Waldemar Major Fydrych is the idol of that part of the generation that came into the world in the second half of the 1960s of the past century and, seeking its place in the Polish reality of the 1980s and 1990s, referring to surrealist forms of expression, sought the artistic expression of youthful rebellion.

2. Socio-historical context

In the second half of the 1970s, Polish society was beginning to experience an economical crisis. On June 24, 1976, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland announced a one-time high increase of food prices. Strikes began at the Radom and Ursus factories and many other locations. Social unrest culminated with a wave of strikes preceding the formation of the Solidarity trade union (ibid.). Even then, the authorities were considering the possibility of imposing martial law to stop the social unrest. The reasons as to why the authorities did not decide to take such action at the time were not fully explained. This period also saw a wave of student strikes, including the strike at the University of Wrocław during which students created posters with slogans referring to the 1968 revolt in France.

The magazine, published at the time by students of the art department, contained not only ideological content, expressing strike demands, but also literary content - including an introduction to a new form of surrealism, called "socialist," whose author was Waldemar „Major" Fydrych. The direct inspiration went back to André Breton's 1925 Manifesto du surréalisme, but the formula itself was only a pretext for introducing a new avant-garde formula from the border between artistic and literary expression. Breton's surrealist Manifesto primarily emphasised the importance of

the imagination, the dreamlike layer and stressed the importance of the content of the work of art, while Fydrych's Manifesto (Fydrych, 1981) "moved" surrealism towards the mass audience. He made the slogan " There is no freedom without dwarfs" which was not only the symbol of a "socialist surrealism," but exposed the graphic motif that was to accompany all street happenings as a symbol of unbridled, unconditional freedom of expression.

> *'Let's not be afraid to be honest to the end. The only solution binding for the future and today is surrealism. The world then will not talk about the crisis. Let's not back down if we have come this far. After all, the whole world is a creation. A single militiaman on the street is a a work of art. Let's play, fate is not a cross. Why suffer when you can rejoice. The fate of life is a lottery fantasy. And religion, love and Dostoevski?'* - That was the basis of the Manifesto (ibid.).

He programmatically rejected all realist aesthetics, both in the form of social realism known from the 1950s, as well as classical realism, represented by Fiodor Dostoevsky's novels. The manifesto was also a form of reckoning with the post-1945 realities. Fydrych affirmed spontaneity, uncompromisingness, "life for the adventures," irrationality, imagination meaning the "unlimited world" (ibid.) Breton's manifesto included the postulate of breaking down the traditional image while preserving the capacity (ibid.). Remaining faithful to surrealism in its original version as a painter, happener, visionary, art historian, he wanted to introduce a new version of surrealism, in a variant that was typically Polish, yet at the same time universal.

3. Socialist surrealism in action

The Orange Alternative was one of the most original social movements of the 20th century with a happening character, it's mission was to promote a "socialist surrealism." The movement's name and the colour orange originated from the Dutch counterculture movement Provos. It's activity dates back to 1965-1967, and was inspired by street artist Robert Jasper Grootveld - the protester and author of the "Provo manifesto" (Moldovan-Cywińska, 2023). Both artists: Grootveld and Fydrych refused to accept the enslavement of the "simple man" under the auspices of any ideology. The proposed manifesto in a direct way: the choice of metaphors, imagery, syntax, description of the role of the poet directly called to the manifesto of the French surrealists.

Grootveld and Fydrych had the street crowds gathering during the events they organised on their side, and the student communities representing various universities. Both believed that happenings were a form of complementary

expression to programmatic texts. In 1981, Waldemar „Fydrych" formulated the *Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism* (Fydrych, 1981), which was published as a stand-alone text and its copies were distributed at organised street events.

Both artists, fascinated by French surrealism, treated happening from the beginning as an almost natural form of artistic expression. Each was fascinated by French surrealism from their youth - in particular, happenings under the auspices of the movement, which complemented the artistic verbal message. It should be mentioned that happening developed in Poland from the early 1960s with the theatre of Tadeusz Kantor, an artist fascinated by the activities of the Parisian surrealists in the 1920s.

Kantor led the study of non-verbal forms of surrealist expression, and as a theoretician and practitioner of surrealist happenings, he intrigued many artists of the younger generation with this form.

4. From toilet paper to Manet artwork

Most Orange Alternative's happenings took place in 1987-1988. One of the first, organised in Wroclaw Poland) on October 1, 1987 under the slogan: „Toilet Paper-First Handout!", was aimed at artistically exposing the effects of shortages of basic goods in stores at the time. A group of 30 people unfurled with surrealistic references to hygiene products and began handing out scraps of toilet paper to gathering passersby while chanting the slogan.

Another important outdoor action of the Orange Alternative was the organisation of alternative celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution in 1987. According to the prepared plan, the participants of the happening were to be dressed in red clothing. In 1988, Warsaw University students under the auspices of the Orange Alternative commemorated Militant Day with a happening, while the slogans presented on the banners were a commentary on the current political and social situation.

Subsequent happenings already had a different character, and their organisers mainly exposed the literary or painting-related aspect of the events. In 1989, there was an oil happening called "Breakfast on the Pavement in Lublin," inspired by Edouard Manet's "*Breakfast on the Grass*," evoking a lively reaction from passersby during the ongoing election silence (Śniadanie:p.2014). Happeners sat on the grass, eating a meal typical of a picnic, encouraging passersby to join in. Intrigued passersby accepted the invitation, which ended in conversations about surrealism and politics despite the then ongoing pre-election silence.

5. Political contexts in 1989

In 1989, the Orange Alternative carried out actions such as: "Galloping Inflation" – participants were running around with placards reading 'galloping inflation' and 'Stamping out Poverty' - which consisted of a loud banging on placards reading 'poverty' by action with participants dressed in rags. The lettering of "Poverty" presented during the happening referred to the lettering of the Solidarity inscription. Another important happening was an event entitled Drinking Foam at the Round Table, organised on February 24 in Łodź (Moldovan-Cywińska, 2023). The expression "drinking foam" in Polish means talking about nothing, while the idea was to symbolically illustrate political negotiations and ridicule the notion of conditional freedom. On March 5, 1989, a happening took place in Lublin under the slogan Fighting Buttons with Loops, i.e. for a big nothing, during which the election programme of cartoon characters was presented[2].

In 1990, PA leaders suspended their surrealist activities, and Waldemar Fydrych went to France, which was particularly close to his heart, for twelve years, returning to Poland only for a short time. The Orange Alternative became active during an exhibition entitled "Dwarfs in Paris" Centre 59 Rivoli, during which photos were presented documenting Orange Alternative happenings, posters, leaflets. There was also a happening, organised during the exhibition, titled "March of the Dwarves to the Bastille," for the still "alive" legacy of surrealism in France meant that the Orange Alternative found an audience there (ibid.).

6. French contexts of the activities of the Orange Alternative

In 2003-2004, a group of students from the University of Arras organised a series of happenings under the banner of Stereotypes. Its purpose was a mocking polemic against stereotypes in European communities, with a particular focus on France and Poland. The theme of socio-political criticism was used by the "Major" in a happening during a student festival in Nancy in May 2004, and a month later in Metz during Marie Anne Isler Beguin's European Parliament election campaign. Thus, the Orange Alternative, after its experience with street happenings in Gdañsk and Lublin, among others, and "populating" Wrocław with dwarf figures, closed the chapter of "perverse" cyclical humour stemming from the assumptions of the Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism (ibid.). The Orange Alternative's surrealist actions

[2] The relationship between the author of the text with the Orange Alternative began via participating in this very happening

became not only a form of strongly emotional expression of the young generation, but a voice of opposition to the imposed norms.

7. Conclusion

Waldemar „Major" Fydrych - although still creatively active - drew up a kind of spiritual testament based on paradox, expressions that are contradictory internally, but bring unexpected truth using the mechanism of juxtaposing contrasting contents and establishing a kind of inclusion between these contents.

He made allusive humour an indispensable means of expressing political and satirical allusion. Referring to allusive satire, he used defragmentation, phraseological ellipsis glorifying semantic neologisms. He did the impossible, colouring and transforming reality into a surreal constellation of events, "revisits", and ideological clues, populating it with symbolic dwarfs. He was a candidate in the elections for the office of mayor of the capital, supported by the Fools and Dwarf Voters' Committee - operating as an association of students and lovers of underground happenings.

During the Educationists' March, metal hooks were handed out to participants as part of a criticism of the dirty election campaign pole-vaulting to expose "hacks." On September 21, 2007, at the Meeting of Educators and Scrooges, straw from the constituency of Sejm Speaker Ludwik Dorn was handed out to passersby as a reference to "straw in shoes," and on September 28, 2007, on the Day of the Secret Service, a representative of Poland's Le surréalisme en action once again "took to the Polish street."

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ДЕШАВАЊА ТОКОМ ПОКРЕТА „НАРАНЏАСТА АЛТЕРНАТИВА" КАО ПРИМЈЕР НАДРЕАЛИЗМА У ПОЉСКОЈ 1980-ИХ

Резиме

Овај текст представља прилог истраживањима надреалне димензије потеза и вербалних порука покрета познатог под називом „Наранџаста алтернатива". Ауторка истиче улогу дешавања током тог покрета и њихову умјетничку те бунтовну димензију, као и везе са надреализмом. Посебну бунтовну ноту дао му је оснивач Покрета, Валдемар „Мајор" Фидрих, наглашавајући суштину вербалне поруке дешавања. У тексту се спомињу *Колажи* Макса Ернста и *Манифест надреализма* Андреа Бретона као надахнуће за програмске активности и вербалне поруке Покрета, који су дио дешавања представљених овдје од почетка 1980-их до постепеног укидања дјеловања Покрета. Потези групе коју је створио Фидрих

дио су актуелног социјалистичког надреализма и одражавају суштину промјена које су одвијале у Пољској крајем 20. и почетком 21. вијека. На крају овог текста може се пронаћи мишљење о умјетничком завјештању Фидриха, који се сматра једним од најзначајнијих надреалиста свијета.
▸ ***Кључне ријечи***: Валдемар „Мајор" Фидрих, дешавања, надреализам, Наранџаста алтернатива.

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